

NOTE: In the statement, the President referred to President Saddam Hussein of Iraq.

## Remarks on Humanitarian Aid to Afghanistan

*October 11, 2002*

Welcome. Please be seated. Thanks for coming. Laura and I appreciate you coming today, and it's a chance to talk about our vision for our friends in Afghanistan.

It was a year ago that American forces were just beginning the liberation of Afghanistan. And on this date last year, a year ago today, I asked the children of America to contribute one dollar to provide food and medical help to the children of Afghanistan. In a year's time after making that request, we've really accomplished a lot. We have. We have seen, of course, the tremendous skill and character of a United States military. We have seen the courage of our allies and our Afghan friends. We have seen the spirit of the Afghan people, who long for freedom. We've seen the great generosity of our fellow Americans extended to men, women, and children on the other side of the Earth.

And yet today I want you all to know and our fellow citizens to know there's still a lot left to do. There's still a lot of work to do in Afghanistan to achieve our dreams and, more importantly, the dreams of the Afghan people. Today America affirms its full commitment to a future of progress and stability for the Afghan people.

I appreciate so very much the Ambassador for being here. Mr. Ambassador, I want to thank you for your service. The Ambassador is a—was an American citizen until recently. He decided he wanted to serve his country, the land of his birth, renounced his citizenship so he could become the official Ambassador from Afghanistan to the United States. And Ambassador Shahryar is a—is a great man who serves a wonderful example of putting your country above yourself.

And so, Mr. Ambassador, we're honored you're here. I want to thank you—where is he? Oh, Ambassador, you'd think they'd have given you a better seat. [*Laughter*] I'm proud of you. I really am.

I'm also proud of Andrew Natsios, who is our Administrator of USAID. I want to thank him. I'll talk about some of Andy's fellow employees here in a minute and what they're doing on behalf of the American people to help Afghanistan children.

Sharif Faez is the Minister of Education—Higher Education. He too used to live in America. He's now serving his country. He shares our vision and understanding of the need to make sure the educational systems are strong and available, so that people can have hope in his country. Mr. Minister, thank you for your service, and I'm honored you're here with us.

I appreciate the Members of the Congress being here. Dana, thanks for coming. Members of my national security team who are working hard on Afghan policy, whether it be Condi Rice, who's the boss, or Zal—where are you, Zal? Thank you, Zal. He knows a lot about Afghanistan. After all, he was from there. Elliott Abrams, members of my team who care deeply about our policy to make sure that our policy is complete.

The—it's very important for our fellow Americans to remember that—keep in mind about the Taliban. They were the most brutal and oppressive Governments—one of the most brutal and oppressive Governments in modern times. It's hard for us to understand in America, but these are people who attempted to control every mind and every soul in the country. They obviously had a vast network of terrorist camps available to train extremists from around the world. Thanks to America and thanks to our friends, thanks to people who love freedom for everybody, the oppressive rule has been lifted. They're no longer in power. They're on the run along with a bunch of other ones over there, too. Afghanistan has entered a new era of hope. And we want to be a continued part of the new era of hope in Afghanistan.

One of our dear values, one of the values we hold close to our heart, is the respect and beliefs of all peaceloving people, no matter what their faith may be. Islam is a vibrant faith. Millions of our fellow citizens are Muslim. We respect the faith. We honor its traditions. Our enemy does not. Our enemy don't follow the great traditions of Islam. They've hijacked a great religion.

But it's important, as we lift that veil, to remember that they are nothing but a bunch of radical terrorists who distort history and the values of Islam. Islam is a faith that brings comfort to people. It inspires them to lead lives based on honesty and justice and compassion.

We've also got a great tradition not only of recognizing freedom of religion and respecting religion; we've got a great tradition of liberating people, not conquering them. It's very important for our citizens to remember that as we upheld that doctrine that said, "If you harbor a terrorist, you're just as guilty as the terrorists," that we went into Afghanistan to free people, because we believe in freedom. We believe every life counts; everybody has worth; everybody matters, whether they live in America or in Afghanistan.

And so we are helping the people to now recover from years of tyranny and oppression. We're helping Afghanistan to claim its democratic future, and we're helping that nation to establish public order and safety, even while the struggle against terror continues in some corners of that country. There's still Al Qaida killers roaming around Afghanistan. We're working closely with the Government to rout them out, not only to make sure that Afghanistan is more safe but also to make sure America is safe as well.

A year ago, it was really hard to find security and safety anywhere in Afghanistan. Just ask the citizens who were there. Now, America is helping to form a new Afghan national army. We are committed to an Afghan national army. The idea is to train 18 battalions of over 10,000 soldiers and finish the task by the end of next year.

I'm proud that Germany is helping as well to bring civil order by helping to build a police force. The International Security Assistance Force, what they call the ISAF, led by coalition countries, is helping to keep the streets safe in the city of Kabul. Security is a requirement for recovery and development—can't have recovery and development unless there is a secure society. America and other nations will continue working with the Afghan Government to build security, so the Afghan people can live their lives without violence and without fear.

A year ago, Afghans were living under history's first-ever terrorist-sponsored regime. These people had found a parasite. And in June of 2002, history will show that Afghanistan reversed its history by having a *loya jirga* and created the most broadly representative government in Afghanistan's history. There are two women serving in President Karzai's cabinet. The institutions of free debate and free press are taking hold. New commissions on human rights and the drafting of a new constitution will lay the groundwork for democracy and for the rule of law. The institutions necessary for the development of a peaceful, hopeful country are going to be put in place soon. We will stay the course to help that country develop—in their image, not in ours.

A year ago, millions of Afghans lived in fear of famine and disease. In the time since, America has delivered food and medicine to the Afghan people. We are committed to the health of the Afghan people. Over the last year, U.N. World Food Programme, with the support of the United States, has provided 575,000 metric tons of food to nearly 10 million Afghans. The United States has also provided seed and fertilizer in time for the spring planting season. The United States joined with other nations to support UNICEF's vaccination of more than 8 million children against measles. American health care officials are helping with other efforts to improve public health, including the fight against polio and malaria, HIV, and tuberculosis. These relief efforts have put hunger and disease on the retreat. We got the Taliban gone. We'd like to get disease and hunger gone as well.

More than 2 million Afghan refugees have returned back to the country since November. That is a positive sign. It's a good sign that people are sensing their country is a better place to live and more secure, a better place to raise a family.

One American bringing hope to Afghanistan is Sergeant First Class Victor Anderson. Victor is with us today. Sergeant Anderson spent 7 months traveling in Afghanistan. He visited hospitals and clinics, provided medical care from his car. He never turned down anybody who asked for help. He treated broken

bones. He treated gunshot wounds. He treated cuts and diseases. He treated a small child who was bitten by a donkey. [*Laughter*] Sergeant Anderson, your service brings great credit to the Army and to America, and the Nation is really grateful for your work.

A year ago, the children of Afghanistan were suffering greatly in a nation beset by war. It's not hard to imagine children suffering in a nation beset by war, and it's really sad. The children of America responded with great compassion. America's Fund for Afghan Children has collected more than \$10½ million. That's a dime at a time or a dollar at a time. That's a lot of kids working hard to collect money. It has allowed the Red Cross to deliver emergency medical supplies to help serve 60,000 people. This fund has helped provide winter clothes to 8,000 children, to help rehabilitate hospitals in Kabul.

Today we've got representatives of the fund, twins, Sarah and Alexander Ahmad. Together, they've raised \$12,000—\$12,000. That's a lot of money. Nearly 25 years ago, Sarah and Alexander's dad came to America from Afghanistan, from war-torn Afghanistan. Today, the family is helping to give peace a chance in their ancestral home and, as importantly, showing the world the generous heart, the great heart, of the American people. I really appreciate the example you're setting, and thank you for joining us today.

And by the way, the fund still exists. And I hope the American children understand there are still people in Afghanistan who hurt a lot. And if you've given once, it's okay to give again to make sure we continue to help the people in Afghanistan.

America will continue to provide that country with essential short-term relief. We also understand that Afghanistan needs long-term economic reconstruction help. And we will meet this commitment as well.

Starting with the Tokyo Conference last January, the United States and 60 other countries have pledged \$4.5 billion over 5 years to work on reconstruction projects. America is delivering on our pledge. We're writing our checks. We're currently implementing more than \$300 million worth of reconstruction and recovery projects. The nations who have made pledges, the other na-

tions, they need to be good on their pledges. If you say you're going to help the Afghan people, do it. If you've made a pledge, write your check. It's important.

America and our partners are helping rebuild roads and bridges and waterways and buildings. Last month, the United States and Japan and Saudi Arabia committed \$180 million to rebuild the highway connecting Kabul, Kandahar, and Herat. It's an important project.

President Karzai spoke to me about it in the Oval Office. He said, "It's important that we show the people that we're—that we can work together to restore the historic link, to make sure that commerce and trade flow more freely and that people are able to find work." I want to thank the Saudi Arabians, the Japanese for joining us in this highly visible and highly important project.

We're also helping to rebuild schools and hospitals and clinics. Some of the first rebuilding is being done by the U.S. Army Civil Affairs soldiers, who are working with relief agencies to rebuild dozens of schools. With us today is Captain Britton London, who enlisted friends, family members, church groups to supply Afghan students with thousands of pens and pencils and notebooks. Captain London is a man after my own heart. He started a—he got the equipment necessary to start the first post-Taliban baseball league. [*Laughter*] He brought me a ball—two balls signed by the Eagles—the Eagles, the Eagles, the mighty Eagles of Afghan baseball. [*Laughter*] And they practice—they're practicing now, and the games are held once a week.

Our soldiers wear the uniforms of warriors, but they are also compassionate people. And the Afghan people are really beginning to see the true strength of our country. I mean, routing out the Taliban was important, but building a school is equally important.

Across Afghanistan, U.S. aid will help build and refurbish several hundred more schools over the next 2 years. We're also in the process of training hundreds of teachers. In March, many girls walked into a classroom for the first time. And our country has provided them as well as the boys with millions of new textbooks.

It's hard to believe—I know it's hard for some in America to believe that the Afghan people were living under a government that would not let girls go to school. It's just hard to imagine in America. But it's reality. And now we've got a lot of work to do to make up for lost time. Everybody counts. Everybody has worth. Everybody matters. Spearheading our back-to-school efforts are Lisa Hartenberger and Nitin Madhav. They work for USAID. They're a part of the—they're a part of the new army in Afghanistan. These are army of compassionate souls who are on the frontlines of making sure that the Afghan people understand our commitment is real, that when we talk about freedom, we understand that freedom is more than just a word. Freedom is a chance for people to get a good education. Freedom is chance for people to get good health care. Freedom is a chance for people to realize their dreams.

And I want to thank—I want to thank these two fine public servants that work for—with Andy, for your service to the country in service of Afghanistan. Thank you, Lisa. Thank you, buddy.

Last year, when the Taliban fell—I know I remember it, and I'm sure a lot of our fellow Americans remember—the images of celebration that took place in the streets. People came out to celebrate freedom. It reminded us that the whole world—in the whole world there is a huge appetite for freedom. People love to be free. And it's important—as we stay in Afghanistan, it will be important for other brave people, whether they live in Muslim countries or in the Middle East, people who stand for tolerance and the rule of law and equal rights and freedom of expression, to see our commitment to freedom; that our commitment for freedom is complete, and it's real, and it's sincere.

It's also important for people to know we never seek to impose our culture or our form of government. We just want to live under those universal values, God-given values. We believe in the demands of human dignity that apply in every culture, in every nation. Human beings should have the right to free speech. Women deserve respect and opportunity. All people deserve equal justice, religious tolerance. This is true in America. This

is true in Afghanistan. These rights are true everywhere.

We've seen in Afghanistan that the road to freedom can be hard; it's a hard struggle. We've also seen in Afghanistan that the road to freedom is the only one worth traveling. Any nation that sacrifices to build a future of liberty will have the respect, the support, and the friendship of the United States of America.

May God bless the people of Afghanistan and of America. Thank you all for coming.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:34 a.m. in Presidential Hall in the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to Representative Dana Rohrabacher of California; Zalmay Khalilzad, Special Presidential Envoy for Afghanistan; Elliott Abrams, Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Democracy, Human Rights, and International Operations; Ishaq Shahryar, Afghan Ambassador to the United States; Minister of Higher Education Mohammad Sharif Faez and President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan; and Lisa Hartenberger, education adviser for Afghanistan, and Nitin Madhav, program development adviser for Afghanistan, USAID.

### **Statement on Signing the Vicksburg National Military Park Boundary Modification Act of 2002**

*October 11, 2002*

I have today signed into law S. 1175, the “Vicksburg National Military Park Boundary Modification Act of 2002.” In 1863, union forces under the command of Major General Ulysses S. Grant and confederate forces under the command of Lieutenant General John C. Pemberton fought for control of Vicksburg, Mississippi, a strategic location on the lower Mississippi River. The Act authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to add the confederate commander's headquarters to the Park, which has included the union commander's headquarters for many decades. The Act will enable the Department of the Interior to preserve property for the education of Americans today, and in generations to come.